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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
17 July 1961

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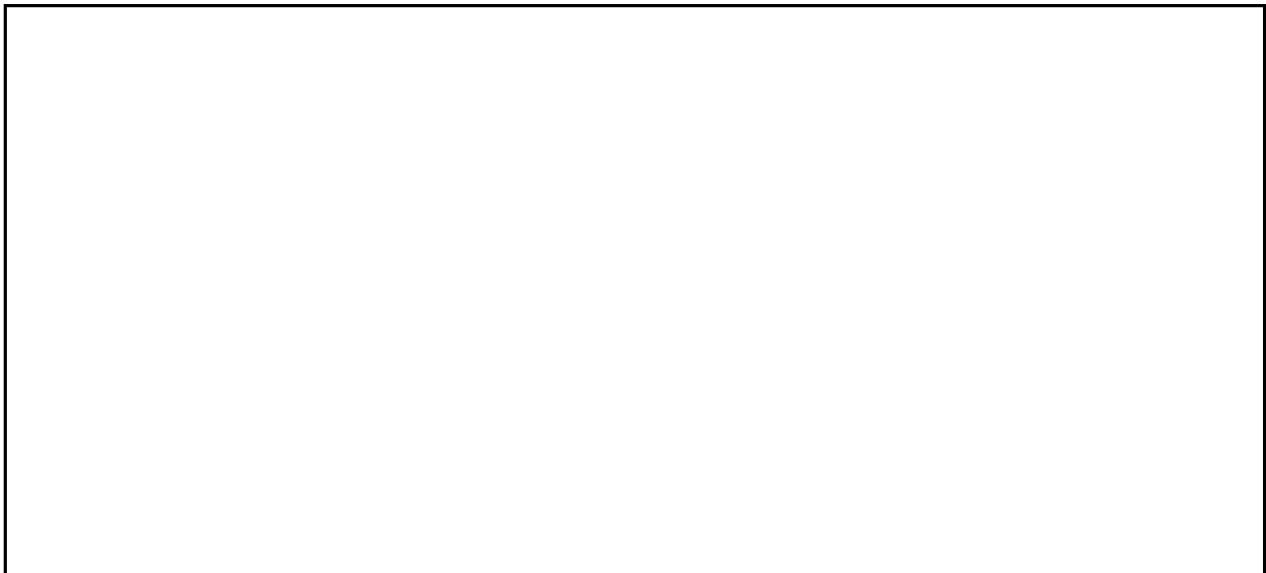
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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: British Guiana Elections of 21 August 1961

1. Offices to be filled: All 35 seats in the elected Legislative Assembly. The leader of the majority party will become premier, and a 13-member senate and council of ministers will be appointed by the governor acting primarily on the advice of the premier.

2. Parties participating: Three main parties will contest the elections: The Communist-led People's Progressive party (PPP) which has headed the colonial government since 1957; the socialist People's National Congress (PNC), and the conservative, anti-Communist United Front (UF). A few seats will be contested by independents or representatives of minor parties.



State Department review completed

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4. Present party strength: Of the 14 elective seats in the present Legislative Council, the PPP has 7 seats, the PNC 3, and independents and minor parties the remaining 4. The PPP won 9 seats in the 1957 elections but one defector now supports the UF and another became an independent. No

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current nonpartisan estimate of party membership is available, but the largely East Indian PPP probably has the edge in a country where the population is approximately 50 percent East Indian and tends to vote on the basis of race rather than issues. The largely Negro PNC tends to draw the support of the Negro 35 percent of the population. The United Force, formed only last autumn, has managed to attract some members from all races, including influential defectors from the two major parties, but its popular appeal has not yet been tested at the polls.

5. Principal issues: Communism, racialism, and economic development are the principal issues, although the campaign is being fought as much on personality as issues. The PNC and UF charge that the PPP will lead the country into the Communist camp and that the party has accomplished deplorably little in its four years in office. The PPP publicly denies Communist intentions and points out that it has obtained both constitutional advance and some economic betterment. The PNC has attempted to arouse its supporters over the issue of discrimination against Negroes, and the UF has been stigmatized as businessmen acting in their own interest. The government's program of control over church schools is building up into a major issue.

6. Principal factors affecting outcome: The tendency to vote along racial lines will favor the PPP, especially if the PNC and the UF fail to form an electoral agreement not to work against each other. A merger effort failed this spring and such an agreement now appears unlikely. Guianese political alliances are tenuous, however, and a last-minute realignment is possible.

At present, the organization of the PPP is the most effective, and the outcome will be influenced by whether the opposition parties can obtain sufficient funds and talent to improve their organization and whether they can sufficiently alarm PPP members to cause them to break party ranks over the issue of Communism. A current slight economic improvement and a rice deal with Cuba have helped the PPP.

The way in which the constituency boundaries are drawn, however, favors the opposition. Furthermore, the relatively strong trade union movement and the commercial interests oppose the PPP.

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7. Background: The election is being held under the new constitution of March 1960 which provides for full internal self-government for the colony. Constitutionally, London could, if necessary, retain control over the police as well as defense and foreign affairs, but it plans to renounce this power, as a trial period of police control under a Guianese minister has worked well.

Britain is anxious to grant independence as soon as practicable, probably in 1963 or early 1964. London believes Jagan is the best political leader available in the colony and anticipates that he will seek aid from both East and West but not again attempt to convert the country into a Communist state. London retains reserve powers to veto agreements with the bloc and to suspend the constitution; the British also retain about 200 troops in the colony currently to assist in maintaining order. In view of their minimal strategic and economic interests, however, the British in the colony are reluctant to interfere with the advance to independence under the PPP. Ultimately, the British hope Jagan's Communist tendencies will be blunted through British Guiana's joining the West Indies Federation, but such an affiliation seems unlikely now.

8. Informed opinion on outcome: The British believe the odds are slightly in favor of a Jagan victory. In a preliminary estimate, the American consul in Georgetown predicted a close race with the PPP winning if the opposition continues to remain divided. He suggested that 11 of the 35 seats could be won by the PPP, 10 by the PNC, and 4 by the UF, and that the PPP could probably pick up 8 of the remaining 10 doubtful seats in a three-cornered race. The PNC will probably do better than the UF.

9. Significance for US security interests: Jagan's victory could result in the first Communist state in South America. As premier, Jagan would probably seek Soviet aid if unsatisfied by the West, but he will be much occupied with problems of administration and is unlikely to jeopardize his chances for early independence by extreme action in advance. Once independent, he will probably move toward closer ties with the bloc and Castro's Cuba, and the country could become a base for subversive activity against the rest of Latin America. In the event of a PNC victory, the combination of

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the inexperienced Burnham in office and Jagan in opposition could result in considerable instability.

British Guiana supplies approximately one fifth of the free world's bauxite, and an American company is active in manganese mining. Jagan has been equivocal regarding nationalization, but in view of his personal commitment to a socialized state, harassment of foreign business and even nationalization are possible.

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HUNTINGTON/D. SHELTON
Assistant Director
Current Intelligence

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